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ABSTRACT

This paper presents findings of a study that investigated the reasons why more women are not in the superintendency when there are many women who are qualified and interested. Using a feminist poststructural approach, the first phase of the research consisted of a pilot case study of four women aspiring to the superintendency. The second phase involved interviews with 27 aspiring superintendents. A total of 68 announcement-of-vacancies brochures were also analyzed. Findings confirmed that the feminist-informed approaches to leadership are part of women's and other nontraditional leaders' styles, clarified the contexts within which a woman aspires to the superintendency, and demonstrated that gender is a major factor in preparation for the position. The women acted in a variety of ways to negotiate potentially inhibiting structures and strove to balance their professional and personal lives. Finally, they resisted discouragement in the face of difficulties. It is suggested that practices be reformed in the following ways: include women and people of color among educational administration faculty; give equal weight to feminist perspectives in administration courses; provide equally authentic superintendent internships; value nontraditional approaches to the superintendency; and develop female networking systems. Contains 47 references. (LMI)

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Aspiring to the Superintendency in the Public School Systems: Women's Perspectives

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Aspiring to the Superintendency in the U.S. Public School Systems: Women's Perspectives

Many studies show that a large majority of superintendents are white males. The 1992 10-year study confirms this is still true; only a small percentage of the nation's superintendents are women or members of a racial or ethnic minority group. (Thomas Glass, 1992, p. x)

Few superintendents of K–12 public school districts in the United States are women although many women have leadership positions in schools. Traditionally the superintendency has been held by white males. Pavan (1985) found that during the years 1970–1984, women superintendents accounted for 3.3 percent. Shakeshaft (1989) shows figures for female district superintendents that range from 1.6 percent in 1928 to 3.0 percent in 1984–85. Feistritzer (1988) reports a nationwide study conducted in 1987 revealing that 96 percent of public school superintendents were men. Even more recent figures show only a slight increase with women superintendents at 5.5 percent in 1990 (Blount, 1993). Glass (1992) also reports in *The 1992 Study of the American School Superintendency,* cited above, that of the more than four million professional educators in the United states, fewer than 1,000 women guide the 15,000 school districts in executive leadership positions (p. 9).

The teaching profession itself, however, is heavily populated by women. Since the turn of this century women have dominated the teaching ranks at all levels (Tyack and Hansot, 1982). Recent nationwide surveys of numbers of women teachers show no significant changes, with figures ranging from 87 percent at the elementary level, 57 percent at the middle level to 52 percent at the secondary level (Bell and Chase, 1993).

However, in the middle management level of principals and assistant principals and increasingly at the central office level, there are women leaders. Quoting from the 1992 publication by the American Association of School Administrators, *Women and Minorities in School Administration: Facts and Figures* 1989–1990, Restine (1993) reports that women account for 20.6 percent of assistant superintendencies nationwide and 27 percent of principalships (p. 17).

Are women leaders seeking the superintendency? I have reason to believe that there are certainly

more women who would like to have the job than the figures reflect. Over the past twenty years significant increases of women in preparation programs suggest that more women aspire to the superintendency now than ever before. Pavan (1985), for instance, reports a fifteen percent increase in the number of superintendent certificates awarded to women between 1970 and 1984 in a Pennsylvania study. Shakeshaft (1989) found that by the mid 1980s women accounted for 50 percent or more of the candidates enrolled in doctoral programs in educational administration throughout the country. In Washington State, a recent survey of qualified female members of the State Administrators Association who subscribe to the statewide vacancy listing sheet, identified approximately 25 women who described themselves as "actively seeking a superintendency" and another 25 who described the superintendency or assistant superintendency as their "desired position" (G. Sharratt, personal communication, April 23, 1993).

Therefore, despite a demonstrated interest in the position that is revealed by such surveys and through an increase of women candidates for the superintendency in university training programs and internships throughout the country over the past two decades, numbers of women superintendents remain small (Ortiz and Marshall, 1988; Shakeshaft, 1989). How is it that they have been so unsuccessful in realizing their aspirations?

While the literature suggests many different reasons, the most compelling findings stem from an examination of the concepts of leadership itself. Women leaders do not necessarily look like their male counterparts. Some do and the reasons for that are explored later in the paper, but at first, it is important to consider the attributes of those who do not and to discover what their leadership attitudes and behaviors have to tell us about leadership.

This is important for two reasons: (1) approaches to leadership in educational administration are seen to be firmly rooted in traditional male styles that therefore have a profound effect on the context of a woman aspiring to the superintendency, and (2) the research findings reported in this paper support a re-visioning of educational leadership. Based on the evidence from data collected in the field, this researcher advocates change in the institution of educational administration to provide for a more gender equitable distribution of superintendencies and for a feminist informed reconception of leadership.

A Feminist Inquiry into Administrative Leadership

How does feminist scholarship explain leadership in educational administration? It is often argued that leaders who can utilize strategies from various different theories are without doubt more effective than those who are locked into one right way. However, a feminist interpretation of leadership offers more than new or different approaches to leadership. Leadership informed by feminist scholarship does not suggest a leader who merely acts differently from a traditional leader, she or he places a completely different emphasis on the function of a leader.

Conventional interpretations of leadership (Blackmore, 1991) assume a number of traditional beliefs: that formal authority is synonymous with leadership; that authority is necessarily inherent in hierarchical relationships; that leadership is based on technique and expertise; and that leadership implies rational decision-making based on empirical evidence (p. 20). While the humanist interpretation "softened" the rigid authoritarian view held previously, in essence, even the interactive models developed in the sixties remained androcentric, influenced largely by Kohlberg's theories of moral decision-making and Rawl's theory of justice (Blackmore, 1991). Such theories assumed that leaders were particular individuals whose innate or acquired capacity to make higher-level judgments were based on abstract or universal moral principals.

Until feminist theory insisted on gender as a fundamental category of analysis, leadership theories remained locked into seeking explanations within the male based definitions already provided. Previously unexamined issues raised by women leaders informed a reconceptualization of leadership itself. Gilligan (1982) reinstated women as morally mature, well able to make decisions on ethical grounds. In particular, she showed that they operated out of world views different from those of men. Perhaps she did not pay enough attention to the variety of lived experiences that inform women's views and she has been criticized for it, but through her insight into an "ethic of care" Gilligan defined an alternative moral ethic, one that had a significant impact on leadership.

Other studies too, in listening to women's own perspectives of their lives and their ways of thinking, made apparent the dominant beliefs that had shaped the discourse (Belenky et al, 1986, Harding, 1991). Instead of leadership being associated with assertiveness, independence, competitiveness, individuality,

hierarchy, and abstract rationality, an inclusive, non-gender-specific model emerged. Moving away from the view of women as "the other," as deficient or handicapped, feminist theory challenged such dualisms as those between rationality and emotionality, assertiveness and passivity, dependence and autonomy, and public and private (Blackmore, 1991). Studies revealed that many women tend to experience themselves as continuous with rather than opposed to others, as attached rather than separate from others, and as valuing this attachment (Ferguson, 1984; Gilligan, 1982; Lyons, 1990).

A feminist perspective encouraged research that uncovered the extent of the androcentric assumptions underlying the notion of leadership. Qualitative research methods, naturalistic inquiry, and ethnography have been rich sources of data (Blackmore,1991; Edson, 1988; Lyons, 1990; Marshall, 1992; Rimmer and Davies, 1985; Scherr, in press; Shakeshaft, 1989). Furthermore, studies of women in business and governmental organizations have contributed much to a revised understanding of leadership (Helgesen, 1990; Kanter, 1997).

Most recently, feminist theories have concentrated on examining the discourse on leadership and administration that not only informs the study of the discipline but also *creates* the knowledge in the field. Influenced by poststructuralism, feminists work to deconstruct the language that is used, to find different metaphors for management (Buzzanell and Goldswig, 1991; Calas and Smircich, 1992; Marshall, 1992).

Indeed an analysis of the language traditionally used to frame careers brings further insight into the situation. "Metaphors depicting 'ladders,' 'races,' 'tournaments,' 'competitions,' 'games,' and so on, typify the intraorganizational struggle for power" (Buzzanell and Goldswig, 1991, p. 485). A woman leader is caught up in a career design that is inherently male and that reinforces male values.

Feminist approaches to leadership argue for a re-visioning of career models to include nonlinear ones that encourage the notion of leadership throughout the organization. Until the belief that managers have "careers" and workers have "jobs" is dismantled, leaders who genuinely wish to draw upon the expertise in all areas of the organization will be operating still under the domination and control paradigm, even if collaborative language is used. Alternatives need to be valued.

Along with the concerted efforts of poststructuralists, feminist theory in its most current form insists on a deconstruction of all the dominant beliefs held by those in power (Harding, 1991). If there is to be any

chance of tapping the sources of leadership that do not conform to the traditional, those dominant beliefs that have shaped the discourse of educational administration need to be examined for the ways in which they have not served all potential leaders equally.

Since research that starts from women's lives will not tell the story of those in power, what will it tell us about leadership? My belief is that it will help us reconceive leadership in order to deal with the multiple issues interdependent with each other facing our current world. After all, if care and nurturance are traditionally associated with women, women's contributions to keeping the human race alive up until now have to be honored both for their historical worth, which is that we *are* still alive and for their intrinsic worth, which is to keep us alive. "We can't afford to have leaders who think only in terms of winning or losing" (McIntosh, 1983, p. 22).

Thus, most importantly, feminist scholarship has provided us with a way to question the taken-for-granted functions of a leader. Current thinking argues for the re-vision of a leader as one who is a facilitator, a catalyst or as a member of a group who *together* work for social change. For if research into women's lives and women's ways has revealed nothing else it has shown that women's work has been valued for its emphasis on preserving relationships and striving to provide a decent survival for all. Particularly in the light of the enormous diversity of ethnicity, culture, and values educators must deal with on a daily basis, is it necessary to approach administration from a relational, interpersonal standpoint.

There is no question that such leadership can be practiced by both women and men. It is not a biological function of only one sex. One of the main criticisms of feminist approaches to leadership has been the tendency "to 'essentialize' male and female, ascribing specific characteristics and behaviors to males and a different set to females, ignoring the complexities of identity among and within individuals, regardless of gender" (Capper, 1993b, p. 15). Thus, whereas feminist theories have been instrumental in helping us to value alternative approaches to leadership, particularly those that have been most stereotypically associated with women, a feminist inquiry into the discourse does not argue for the essentialism mentioned above. Instead as Capper (1993b) puts it, all nontraditional approaches to leadership including feminist ones, "envision schools as learning communities where regular conversations ... occur" (p. 36). Such dialog leads to "empowering leadership" or leadership that recognizes the need

for discussion, sustained critical thought and self-interrogation (p. 39).

A Study of Women Leaders in Educational Administration

What is happening in the field? Since more women are preparing themselves for the job, the question is why do the numbers remain small? To what extent have traditional views of leadership hampered women in their aspirations? This research was designed to try to understand what it is like for a woman aspiring to the superintendency in the public school systems in this country. I imagined that qualified women who would like the job but do not have it would have some answers. Thus, a study of K–12 women administrators who aspire to the most prestigious job in public schools was devised to try to see from their perspectives what it is like to be highly qualified educational professionals considering their chances for the superintendency. I sought to know what kind of women aspired to this job that is held by so few of their women colleagues.

McLeod (1987) defines aspirations as "one's preferences relatively unsullied by anticipated constraints" (p. 60). In other words I have taken aspirations to mean the hopes of a superintendency as the desired occupational outcome of the academic and experiential preparation that motivates educators in the public school systems. Although I heard their fears too, I concentrated on their hopes. Therefore, I identified women who desired the superintendency for reasons of personal and professional interest in the position. I looked for participants whose background and training provided good preparation for the job. From a feminist perspective I was eager to find out what contributions these aspirants would make to educational leadership when and if they reached their goal.

I chose to study a group of women who saw themselves as qualified to be superintendents rather than women who were already superintendents because I wanted to understand how aspirations are formed. Often after a person achieves a job that he or she has been seeking, it is difficult to remember with the same acute feelings what it was like to be "in the wings" so to speak. The exhilaration that accompanies the successful realization of an aspiration can obliterate the pain of not knowing whether in fact, aspirations would ever be realized. I wanted to talk to women who were in the throes of such a process. I hoped to learn what it takes to retain aspirations in the shadow of potential constraints. Thus, a group of women

aspiring to the superintendency could talk of their particular *places* in the world of educational administration, places that would disappear if and when they became superintendent. I felt that to be helpful to those who come after, for those who are also considering such aspirations, this research could best inform us of what is like to be in that shifting, unstable position of aspirant.

Building on previous research[1], and taking into account the kinds of deterrents identified, I also approached this research from the point of view that there must have been ways to overcome at least some of the obstacles to women. For if barriers to women such as: an absence of role models, being place-bound, lacking the support of other women, missing the sponsorship of influential mentors and the constraint of personal responsibilities were as powerful as other research suggested, which women were out there aspiring to the superintendency? Surely the deterrents would have repelled them long before they could consider their prospects for the job. If nothing else, a study of those who identified themselves as aspiring to the top position in the K–12 public school systems would show how they had avoided discouragement.

Theoretical Framework

A modified poststructuralist approach informed by feminism was used to analyze the data. Davies (1993) defines poststructuralism as:

> ... referring to concepts developed by a diverse range of French writers (such as Derrida, Lacan, and Foucault) working across historical, literary, philosophical and psychoanalytic areas of study.... These writers (see) ... the human psyche ... as being in process, as capable of multiple possibilities as it finds itself positioned now one way and now another in relation to its own history and context, spoken into existence through multiple and contradictory discourses. (Davies, 1993, p. 38)

She goes on to point out though, that the dangers inherent in the poststructuralist approach are the nihilistic tendencies that result from a disruption of certainty, a rejection of the modernist faith in rationality, and an abandonment of the quest for an objective reality. Poststructuralism makes no attempt to propose measures of reform or to advocate social change. Therefore as Weedon, (1987); Davies (1993, 1994); Lather, (1991,1992); and Capper, (1992, 1993a, 1993b) argue, the juxtaposition of feminist critical

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[1]For instance the work of Bell and Chase, 1993; Blount, 1993; Coursen et al., 1989; Edson, 1988; Feistritzer, 1988; Glazer, 1991; Jones and Montenegro, 1988; McCarthy et al., 1988; Ortiz and Marshall, 1988; Pavan, 1985; Rimmer and Davies, 1985; Scherr, in press; Schmuck; 1975; Shakeshaft, 1989.

theory alongside poststructuralism allows the energy released by the latter to be channeled into breaking down those social structures that have oppressed all whose interests were not being served by the dominant discourses. Likening feminist poststructuralism to critical inquiry, Weedon (1987) shows that we need not accept "established meanings, values, and power relations" (p. 174). She asserts that it is a framework that can be used to explore all political and social practices for pressure points that can be applied to bring about change.

The value of a feminist contribution to poststructuralism is the weaving of practice with theory and the subsequent focus on "the human potential to make a difference in practice." Most important is the encouragement to "take a stand in the midst of self-reflection" (Capper (1993b) citing Lather (1992), p. 18). Weedon (1987) argues that feminist poststructuralist inquiry "enables us to give meaning to the world and to act to transform it" (p. 32). Thus, by the deconstructive process of examining all claims of knowledge for their historical and cultural situatedness, individuals are aided in their search for the bases upon which knowledge is founded. And if knowledge can be seen as located in the knower, she or he can reflect on the extent to which each claim serves her or his individual purpose and begin to make changes accordingly. Indeed feminist poststructuralism advocates research that identifies possibilities for social change.

The key concepts of poststructuralism that enable us to accomplish the above are: language and discourse, subjectivity, power, and common sense. Language and discourse refers to the all-encompassing experience of individuals negotiating their way through every day interactions with sets of commonly shared words and phrases.To see discourse and discursive practices with "poststructuralist eyes" is to see which values and interests are silenced and the extent to which others are being served (Capper, 1993a). Capper advocates asking: Who is articulating the discourse, and what is the source of authority (p. 20)? The use of terms is to be examined for the ways in which they contribute towards the maintenance of the status quo.

Similarly, the concept of subject and subjectivity is central to the poststructuralist framework. Subjectivity refers to: "the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself and her ways of understanding her relation to the world" (Weedon, 1987, p. 32). For Davies (1994) subjectivity "is made possible through the discourses s/he has access to, through a life history of being in

the world" (p. 3). Different from the more fixed notion of identity, this idea of subjectivity allows us to understand how we are constituted by our position in a discourse. It casts doubt on the notion of an active unified creation of self and focuses on "the shifting, fragmented, multifaceted and contradictory nature of our experiences" (Davies, 1994, p. 3.).

Finally, the arguments of common sense that undergird many cultural values need examining. Common sense is defined as "the assumptions which ... relate to particular definitions of what is natural, appropriate, moral or good" (Weedon, 1987, p. 77). Expressions such as "everybody knows that" or "it's just the way things are," are warning signals. Who knows that? Why are things that way? Securely placed within the discourses themselves ideas that are described as common sense can be good clues as to who is thought common to which group.

Thus, a feminist poststructural approach to the analysis of my data will help to identify which discursive frameworks have been most significant in the lives of the women aspiring to the superintendency. Davies (1994) suggests that since people "position themselves differently in relation to existing discourses" (p. 26), a liberatory power is generated by understanding how the discourse has formed each person. It is likely that there is not always coherence among the different discourses. Being able to recognize discursive frameworks is an empowering experience, one that enables an individual to reposition oneself in alternative ways.

Design and Methodology

As an educational administrator, unfamiliar with the public school systems in the United States, I approached the study from the professional point of view of one whose knowledge of the system was distorted and partial. Inspired by Biklen and Shakeshaft's (1985) call for new scholarship on women, I chose to use qualitative research methods to collect my data. Belenky et al. (1986) make a powerful case for research that allows the participants of a study to speak in their own voices. By removing the researcher from a position of authority or expert, advocates of qualitative research concentrate on producing new accounts of individuals' lives that contribute to a more complete view of social situations. In feminist poststructuralist terms, findings from this new scholarship do not replace the old. They add to the

multiplicity of perspectives that exist.

Influenced by the feminist assumption "that ways of knowing are inherently culture bound and that researcher values permeate inquiry" (Lather, 1992, p. 91), I acknowledged my advocacy approach. My biases were directed towards change-enhancing research (Lather, 1992). At the outset, I took the position that a more equitable distribution of well-qualified women in the superintendency was desirable. Again my personal history lead me to this certainty.

In an international school in Japan I had worked hard as a member of a female administrative team, atypical of the region. Our rewards were students whose preparation for college or the work force gave them a head start amongst their peers. They returned to the school again and again to tell us what a good foundation they had received. Therefore, I was predisposed to believe that women make good educational decisions for the welfare of children. I had observed our strategies in the light of those adopted by other administrative teams and considered ours more student-centered. We had the reputation of having built a family of faculty, staff, students, and community members. Indeed, although I was not aware of it at the time, I was getting firsthand insights into what I have come to know as alternative approaches to leadership.

Prejudices such as these notwithstanding, I was capable of realizing that good leadership was not a gender specific attribute. Not all women in my experience had been thoughtful, child-oriented administrators. Likewise, not all men had been the opposite. But at the same time, after conducting the pilot study I felt convinced that I would meet excellent candidates for the superintendency when I had identified the participants for my study. I deliberately projected that belief both in seeking participants and in conducting the interviews.

Lather (1992) puts it this way:

> Many feminists wish to maximize the research process as a change-enhancing, reciprocally educative encounter (Lather, 1988). Such work argues that overtly value-based, advocacy research openly opposed to the maldistribution of power is neither more or less ideological than is mainstream research. Rather, those committed to research approaches that challenge the status quo and contribute to a more egalitarian social order have made an "epistemological break" (Hesse, 1980, p. 196) from the positivist insistence upon researcher neutrality and objectivity. (p. 92)

The study was conducted in two stages. Initially, a pilot study of four women who were identified by

a university professor as aspiring to the superintendency were interviewed in the early part of 1993. Through in-depth interviews and participant observations of the administrators in their work places, data was collected and analyzed through a process of analytic induction (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992; Glaser and Strauss, 1967). At the conclusions of the pilot study participant feedback and nominations of further potential participants helped to extend the study into the second stage.

By then, based on findings from the pilot study, information from the literature and informal discussion amongst practitioners in the field, I had compiled a profile of likely characteristics indicative of potential women aspirants to the superintendency. These included: (1) completion of or work towards a superintendent credential; (2) completion of or work towards a doctorate; (3) either a principal's position or a central office position; and (4) expressed interest in or experience of applying for a superintendent's position. Thus, 23 more aspirants and two superintendent consultants were subsequently interviewed from Spring through Winter, 1993. I was engaged in field work for the equivalent of a school year.

Substantive theory was generated by a systematic analysis of the data collected in open-ended, in-depth interviews of 60 to 90 minutes. The face-to-face interviews conducted in settings most convenient for the participants were recorded and transcribed. I approached each interview from the point of view of one who does not know exactly what needs to be known in order to answer the research questions. The participants were encouraged to lead me in the discussion (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Although I used two or three general questions to start the interview and provide a focus on the general topic of what it is like to aspire to the superintendency, I relied on each participant's sense of where she would like to go with the interview (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Merton and Kendall, 1946 in Bogdan and Biklen, 1992). Indeed the interviews varied according to the each participant's individual set of circumstances both professional and personal. Most took place in the participant's office.

According to established methods of qualitative research (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992; Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Miles and Huberman, 1983; Strauss, 1987), I kept extensive field notes and a methodological log of ideas that informed the developing theory that was grounded in the data. I used a system of memos (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987) to reflect constantly on what connections I was making, and to record the source of my insights.

Similarly in line with accepted procedures, I utilized peer debriefing methods and participant feedback to verify my conclusions and establish trustworthiness (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). These were ongoing strategies used throughout the study. Not only was I acutely aware of my outsider status, I was eager to hear what the participants had to say to my articulation of their experiences. Since many of the participants themselves, through either their own doctoral work or through their own interests, were familiar with the literature, some of our discussions on my findings were doubly informative.

Influenced by others who advocate a feminist poststructuralist approach to research in education (Capper, 1992, 1993a, 1993b; Cherryholmes, 1988; Davies, 1993, 1994; Lather, 1991, 1992), I placed great emphasis on the context within which the remarks were made by the participants in this study. I tried to discover the constitutive power of the ways of talking and writing about aspiring to the superintendency. Most particularly, I tried to detect the incoherence between the different discursive frameworks within which the aspirants are immersed. Finally, I have tried to identify my contribution to the research by examining my own assumptions, and my own subjectivity. In doing so, I wish to offer the participants the means of

> ... claiming the right to subject status – a subject who realizes, recognizes, speaks, writes her [collective] subjected condition and searches out the ways in which the patterns that hold that subjection in place can be subverted and turned to other ends. (Davies, 1992, in Davies, 1994, p. 42)

The Participants

At the time of the study, the majority of the 27 aspiring superintendents[2] were central office administrators. At a variety of different levels 16 women had served as building principals and three as assistant principals before reaching the central office. However, eight women had moved into the central office essentially from the classroom, although many of them had held a specialist position in addition to their classroom responsibilities.

Although most of the participants were employed in school districts, one was a graduate student at a

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[2]Consistent with established practice in qualitative research, the participants were assured of the confidentiality of their interviews. Thus, only pseudonyms are used to identify them. No reference is made to the actual location of their jobs and some of the job titles have been changed to protect the participants, although the integrity of the situation has been retained.

university, one was at an Educational Service District and one worked at the Office of State Superintendent of Public Instruction. Two additional participants in the study were experienced superintendents who serve from time to time as consultants on superintendent searches for the State School Directors Association.

Scattered throughout the state, districts represented by the aspirants range in size from approximately 40,000 students to just over 100 students. At the time of the study, six school districts had fewer than 5,000 students, three had between 5,000 and 10,000 students, six had between 10,000 and 20,000 and two districts had more than 20,000 students. Altogether 18 different school districts are represented. Five are located in the Eastern part of the state and 13 are in the Western part.

Of the aspiring superintendents 23 were Caucasian Americans and four were African-Americans. The aspirants ranged in age from 41 to 60 and the average age was 47. One of them has never been married, five are divorced and were single at the time, and the remaining 21 were married at the time of the study. Of the total number, five women have been married more than once, and 13 had school-age children or younger living with them when they were interviewed.

More than half possess doctorates in education; 13 of the degrees are from universities in-state, and three are from other universities in the United States. Of the 11 women without doctorates, three are currently enrolled in a doctoral program, and two other women have completed most of the requirements for the degree. All of the participants without doctorates have masters degrees. Most of the aspirants have a superintendent credential or are working on one.

Narrative

The discussion of the participants' aspirations fell into four different categories: (1) Academic and professional preparation for the superintendency; (2) work environment; (3) discourses at home such as mothering, partnering and homemaking; and (4) alternative approaches to leadership.

To support the comments of the aspirants, I analyzed a selection of 68 *Announcements of Vacancies,* brochures describing the position and outlining the expectations of the Board of Directors of a school district hiring a new superintendent. These provide excellent insights into what the dominant discourse of educational administration expects of an aspirant to the superintendency. My sources cover the period

1990 to the present.

Academic and Professional Preparation for the Superintendency

While there are various routes to the superintendency, many steps along the way are prescribed by the dominant discourses of educational administration. Candidates for the superintendency are initially expected to be prepared for the position in two different ways: (1) a high level of formal training, including at least eligibility for if not completion of state superintendent certification and a university degree beyond the bachelor's, and (2) credible prior experience on-the-job as an administrator capable of handling a superintendency, if not actual experience as a superintendent. Additionally, an indirect kind of preparation strongly advised is (3) the molding of a candidate by influential sponsors.

While most of the candidates were willing and able to pursue academic preparation both in response to the discourse and motivated by a faith in the worth of academic training for the position, there were others whose experiences had not offered easy access to the degree programs.

For instance on the one hand, Lorraine Darnell argues:

> I try not to position myself so that there are reasons that people can say no. You don't want to give them some; not having a doctorate could be a reason to say no, without really considering the abilities. Four or five years ago I would have said I could never get a superintendency in this state without having a doctorate. I don't say that today, simply because too many people call on me to do things, to work with their districts, to get things done. I still think it's important for me to have it, so I'll continue and I'll do that.
>
> (Lorraine Darnell)

But on the other hand:

> The decision not to get the doctorate was based on watching [others] and frankly I would have to say it was all men in this district getting their doctorates and the fact that their jobs slipped while they were doing it because they were doing both and I could never bring myself to not doing a good job and so I would have had to take a sabbatical and from an economic point of view, at the time that I most likely should have been doing that, it wasn't something that economically was feasible. (Denise Weir)

Still others were critical of the real benefits of university preparation for the practical execution of the work in a superintendency.

In Pam Arndt's words:

> When I did my superintendent [credential], I did a couple of internship things. The superintendent put me on administrative council, I mean the cabinet. I also conducted some kind of survey, but I didn't do anything else. When this other principal did it, he rewrote the policy book, and it seemed, and I hate to judge [the

> superintendent) in this way because he has been a wonderful benefit, but it seemed like there was of more credence to the others. Maybe he didn't think I was superintendent material; who knows. (Pam Arndt)

Yet these women have much to offer instead of academic degrees. They have strong on-the-job training for the position. Many even consider themselves fully qualified for a superintendency without a principalship because of the alternative approaches to leadership they offer, approaches that they believe will provide a better education for children.

Eleanor Martinson explains:

> I've not come up through the traditional principal role. I've been in the central office for a long time but I've never been a principal and I think we're beginning to see more women and others go into administration who have not had all of that line experience I think that the line experience sometimes inhibits as much as it you know creates because it it places authority and the perk giving and so on in that hierarchical kind of arrangement and the times I think are changing so significantly that that kind of stuff isn't going to be useful any more. (Eleanor Martinson)

For many women though, to consider the superintendency without all the expected kinds of preparation would be futile. The dominant discourse is too powerful in its deterrence of the non-traditional. Lorraine Darnell puts it in perspective:

> When (the community) perceive their superintendent, they perceive quite often a male figure. To think about a female, it needs to be one that can demonstrate some competencies wherein if it's a male figure, it's almost easier to accept that it's a male and then you may ask about the competencies, but as soon as you see a female, you equate the need for the competency right along with the gender. (Lorraine Darnell)

Thus, the response of those women in this study who retain such aspirations is contrary to convention. The women in the study who have taken a stand and offer alternative kinds of preparation are suggesting a shift in the discourse.

However, the kinds of disruptions referred to have had limited success in terms of securing superintendencies, at least up until now. Alternative approaches to leadership have not been valued by school boards without evidence of many of the traditional male approaches as well. At the same time adhering to discursive practices that have been seen to favor male aspirants has also had limited success. What are the contradictions inherent in the discourse? A closer look at the binary opposition of male/ female in the working world of women administrators sheds some light on the contextual factors with which women aspirants have to deal .

Work Environment

This section focuses on the social and institutional context of the woman administrator at work in the public schools. As Weedon (1987) suggests, like it or not individuals are shaped by institutions such as educational administration and are subject to the social meanings produced within the discourse. Further, despite best intentions, the extent to which individuals can bring about change within these institutions is questionable. Weedon describes individuals not as the authors of change but as the agents of it and she points out the caveat that change can either continue to "serve hegemonic interests" or can "challenge existing power relations" (p. 25).

Themes dealt with by the aspirants when relating what it is like to be a woman administrator include (1) aspects of the job influencing administrative styles, such as male/female behaviors, treatment by community members, peers, superiors and subordinates; (2) the absence or presence of support groups; and finally, (3) how marital status and other issues of sexuality have an impact on their working lives. One thread in all of the stories is the presence of the binary opposition of male/female that unravels to expose the opposition of administrator/woman. Although most participants felt that they were first and foremost educational administrators, few denied that particularly in the context of aspiring to the superintendency, they were judged as women administrators not simply administrators.

Relating a story about another administrator, Ruth Turner describes it like this:

> She is extraordinarily bright, but she's very flamboyant, very assertive, very aggressive, and when she would go to meetings or when she would conduct meetings, rather than sort of dressing in a demure fashion or being sort of reflective, she's just who she is and for the most part, I think that was real appealing to most of the people.... But when it came to the superintendents as a group ... not directly to her, but to her supervisor ... they made it very clear that she was somebody that they found threatening and that, the best way to describe it they didn't feel that she was playing by the rules and they didn't like it. I don't think it was a personal thing, but they didn't feel comfortable with her in a leadership capacity.... I don't know how to describe it, but I know that ultimately she left. But had she stayed in that particular position, I think they would have made her life very uncomfortable and I think that they would have done it by going to her boss and making it clear that she needed to either make changes or move on. (Ruth Turner)

If we could deconstruct the binary opposition of aggressive/conciliatory or directive/collaborative implied in leadership styles that are also associated with the male/female dualism, we could "create a more fluid and less coercive conceptual organization of terms that transcends binary logic by simultaneously being both and neither of the binary terms" (Lather, 1991, p. 13, drawing on Groscz, 1989, p. xv). If

leadership styles are seen as adaptable and complex each person having the capacity to adopt one or the other, then the original binary terms have no meaning (Davies, 1994). In any case the discourse of educational administration is currently undergoing a shift with less directive, top/down leadership styles losing favor, at least in the rhetoric of legislative measures designed to encourage shared leadership. Whether this will be enough to achieve the deconstruction necessary before a transformation of styles can take place remains to be seen. As yet, the contradictory nature of the aspirants' experiences with regard to what is an appropriate personal style leaves them with the realization that gender and race are powerful factors in the constitution of their subjectivity.

Most of the women were at one time or another the only woman member of an administrative team. Some still find themselves in that situation especially those close to the level of superintendent. Thus, the discursive practices in which they found themselves immersed were dominated by those that had been developed by both the male administrators in place and those who had preceded them. For instance in the early days, Elaine Schultz felt silenced at professional meetings.

> When I first went to some principals' conferences, there was like few women there, the informal conversations would be about sports and all that, and I'm going, yeah, I don't know what you're talking about but I understand, you know, I just kind of stood there and listened, because you really don't have a whole lot to contribute to that and in fact ... haven't been back to one since because I didn't feel comfortable there. There weren't very many women there. I couldn't really talk about the informal things that the guys were talking about. Doing real well in the situations we were talking about schooling and what's going on and all that kind of stuff, no problem; but the informal stuff and then there not being any women there, it was just a drag.... But I've really enjoyed the ones that are more mixed, more gender mixed. (Elaine Schultz)

The presence of other women can help close the gap between the different personal worlds women and men administrators inhabit. Lucille Clarke puts it like this:

> Any time we're together, we talk the same language, you know, we have some real common characteristics – all work very long hours, very hard working, super-organized, on task – so I think we talk the same language.... I think support would be a good way to describe it. I think it allows us to talk about the job from a woman's perspective and it also allows us the opportunity to talk about parenting in conjunction with this or having a marriage or a divorce in conjunction with this. (Lucille Clarke)

Perhaps the most difficult and yet most important context to analyze is the sexual one. The acknowledgment of the taken-for-granted married status for instance, is woven throughout the aspirants' stories. And so are the very subtle ways in which the male/female dualism played out in sexual terms reinforces hegemonic male heterosexual norms.

Appropriate life-styles enter in as factors in job interviews. This is likely to be the case for candidates of either gender as Marilyn Browne says: "They just like to hire someone who's safely married." Though it is not entirely clear what marriage keeps people safe from. Or perhaps it is the community who is safer from a married person than an unmarried one. In any case, Beth Sundvall's status as single for most of her career has been an issue that she has had to deal with. She believes it has exposed her to suspicion, more so as a single woman never married than if she had been married previously.

> The fact that I am now married helps me immensely. ... because I'm aware of even when you're [a candidate] for assistant superintendent, that while you're not supposed to ask questions about people's personal lives, they always have. ... they wanta know if you're a lesbian, they wanta know if you're promiscuous, they wanta know, is she normal; questions like that. (Beth Sundvall)

Comparing women candidates to men candidates, Beth goes on to say that:

> If a man were my age and were divorced, I don't think they would ask nearly as many questions. It's being my age and not having been married, so if they had an applicant who was 49 years old and had never been married, yeah, I think they'd ask those questions about a man, too, because it's a different life-style pattern than most people have. Most people get married. Lots of them also get divorced, but most of them get married.... If they asked question[s] about a man and they got the answer yes that occasionally he was [promiscuous], that would probably be good news 'cause to them that would mean that he wasn't gay. I think that would be the issue, where if they ask it about a woman and they found out that in some people's opinion she had been promiscuous, that would be bad news. (Beth Sundvall)

Thus, while life-styles and sexuality for both men and women are judged very conservatively, women do not have the same option of sexual encounters outside marriage that men do. At least not if they develop a reputation for extramarital affairs. It is not as socially acceptable for a woman as it is for a man.

The context within which women administrators work bound by such "power relations of everyday life" (Weedon, 1987, p. 25), as those that constitute the basis of the male/female dualism is problematic for a woman. The pervasive nature of this dualism reaches into all of a woman's positions. She is unable to be seen solely as an educational administrator. She is always a woman administrator. Some of the participants in this study challenge the discourse with impunity, some are scarred by their experiences, but most prefer not to disrupt accepted patterns. To the extent that many women administrators are still, if not on their own, in the minority and in subordinate positions, their efforts to initiate new discourses are weakened.

Discourses at Home

Many of the aspirants in this study firmly placed within the discourse of educational administration, are also in the process of being constituted by the discourses of partnering, mothering and homemaking. These three gendered discourses require large investments of time. Caught up in the effects of more than one dominant discourse a woman aspiring to be superintendent often finds the contradictions inherent in the different discourses, to be unworkable. Nevertheless, individuals are not passive and many of the participants did explore ways to challenge the discourses by redefining their position within it. The extent to which an individual can do this however, varies. From the interviews, it was evident that in certain periods of their lives, the women felt so bound by the discourse on partnering, or mothering for instance, that all other considerations were subordinated to it.

> In direct contrast to the humanist assumptions of a unified, rational self, poststructuralism proposes a subject that is fragmentary, inconsistent, and contradictory. (Gavey, 1989, p. 465)

Issues that expressed the tensions felt by the women included: (1) fear of failing as a mother; (2) responsibility for the maintenance of relationships; and (3) coping with household labor. If any theme helps to weave all those concerns together, however, it is an intense preoccupation with time management. As Rosalynn Grady puts it: "When you go into [administration] you have to go in with both feet, I mean it's just all-consuming." Shirley Meyers makes the point that at home her husband says "We have to plan time to do something together," because she has been so caught up in her work. Where the tensions are most visible then, is in the fragmentation experienced by the participants in their attempt to give enough of the 24 hours in a day to all of the competing discourses.

The current conservative image of a woman who is also a mother is one of firm commitment to the needs of the children. Eleanor Martinson, for instance, juxtaposes the opportunities for a superintendency beside the considerations she has for her children.

> Well people have been asking me – the superintendent's been encouraging me to look for a superintendency for the last six years and because of where my family is – I'm a single parent – and I'm a place bound person – I've chosen to be place bound because I think it has been the healthiest choice for my daughter who is going to graduate with honors from high school and go to a college and she's a very centered person and I made that choice for her. Now I could have dragged her somewhere else and I wouldn't have liked the consequences of that choice. It wouldn't have felt appropriate to me in my role as a mother. And so I've done that you know ... It's been very conscious but she will graduate this year and so that puts me in a slightly different spot even though I still have a son at home. (Eleanor Martinson)

And as Courteney Traylor found, the tensions that resulted from being a principal and a mother of young children can be disheartening to a woman trying to combine both.

> It just tears you apart in terms of trying to commit to both and I think something suffers; either the job suffers or the family suffers, so I found that to be extremely challenging and if I was to do it again, I wouldn't do it. I would devote more time to my children. (Courteney Traylor)

Weedon (1987) explains it like this: "Where there is a space between the position of subject offered by a discourse and individual interest, a resistance to that subject position is produced" (p. 112). Drawing on Foucault, Weedon goes on to say that power is a relation that inheres in difference. Nowhere is it more evident than in the different positions offered to men and women in the discourses of mothering and fathering. While the women administrators have felt keenly the contradictions mentioned above, their stories of male administrators who are also constituted by the discourses of fathering and male partnership offer a stark contrast.

In Lucille Clarke's comments below it is possible to see just to what extent lived experiences of men and women educational administrators can differ.

> I remember for years I just longed to have a wife – I would be here on Monday nights and I would have my children taken care of and I would call my children to see how they were – ha[ve] they done their homework. I'd probably call them twice, but I would work straight through the board meetings [a]nd I would just be here all by myself. The men would go home – their wives would have fixed dinner, they would shower and shave and come back fresh and I would have been up since four-thirty. And it didn't really bother me but I noticed it – you know at a certain time the office would clear and meanwhile I would be finishing up work and I'd been checking in with my children – you know it's just a different life experience. (Lucille Clarke)

Similarly, male administrators have been geographically much more mobile. As Beth Sundvall points out they take their support with them.

> [The superintendent] had taken his wife and children and dragged them all over the country. I mean he'd been a very successful superintendent and all, but [when it was] time for a new job, wife and children [were] yanked up and moved away. He took his support system with him. (Beth Sundvall)

The experiences of many participants suggest that the discourse on partnering, whether inside a marriage or without, is different for the male partner and the female partner. At least in the early stages, it appears to be expected that the family's decisions will revolve around the male job prospects. He comes across as the initiator of the direction for the family. In contrast, many of the women are happy, for a time, to put their careers "on the back burner" as Shirley Meyers says. For some like Rosalynn Grady whose first priority is maintenance of the relationship, there is a sense that whatever the career possibilities are that

emerge, they must emerge within the context of the relationship. It is like a tapestry to be woven with threads already provided. The power is not in the individual man whose employment considerations form the basis of the arrangement, it is in the process of maintaining the relationship that falls on both partners, but more traditionally on the woman.

This notion is reinforced by what happens when some women are prepared to disrupt the discourse. Eleanor Martinson describes it like this:

> Women think they've got to do it all. They've got to be all. I [felt] like that for a long time. It was real interesting – I gave a little talk at a conference several months before I was given notice that a divorce was on its way and at this conference, the point of it was, yes you can be it all, you can have it all. You know you freeze dinners weeks in advance and you plan these meals and you do all this kind of stuff and yes you can be the everything woman. And then I got notice of these divorce papers and I thought, oh well maybe not.
>
> (Eleanor Martinson)

Echoing Eleanor's desire "to be it all," Peggy Ross too, felt that she "should have been able to manage it." Drawing on Kristeva, Davies (1994) argues that there is strength in living with contradictory discourses because the world is made up of multiple and contradictory discourses. The key for women is in re-visioning their positions within the discourses in positive ways. If, like Peggy, we carry that feeling that we should have been able to manage it then there is no escape from the destructive force of fragmentation. However, listening to Lorraine Darnell, one hears how it can be achieved differently.

> I don't do any of the laundry in the house, I don't do any of the vacuuming or any of those other things; I cook and I do certain things and my husband and my kids do the others. So we have from the very beginning before children came, made some decisions about our responsibilities, but that's why I needed to be up-front and clear.
>
> (Lorraine Darnell)

In the end, whatever else goes into the maintenance of relationships, the equitable distribution of household labor seems to signify most clearly a repositioning of a woman in the discourse of homemaking.

Pam Arndt, and Ruth Turner for instance, talk of the demands of a superintendency particularly on those with children still living at home.

> You need a wife. I think to pull it off, to have any kind of quality life yourself, you would have to have live-in help for the demands that children bring, because it's morning 'til night because every week, for hours. I do feel that if I was in the superintendency, I could afford to have somebody come and do the dinner. I wouldn't have to cook it.
>
> (Pam Arndt)

> One of the things I've thought about is if you look around, how many female superintendents actually have children? Probably not a lot and they've consciously made that decision.... My husband helps out an

> extraordinary amount ... but I think that our family is somewhat atypical. The sense that I have is that most women do all the work at home, plus their job. (Ruth Turner)

Yet another participant, Dorothy Jameison, relies on practices like waking at two or three in the morning to give her the peace of mind she is looking for. At no time in our discussion did she or any of the others who felt great pressure from the different discourses they were immersed in, express a desire to relinquish one or other of their positions. At the same time none of them considered reversing the order of their priorities. As Dorothy says she does her work at a time that she doesn't feel is "interfering with any demands that the family has." It is clear for all those participants who are constituted by the discourses on mothering, partnering and homemaking that the family comes first.

However, the point is that unlike their male counterparts, the participants experience daily contradictions in trying to speak from multiple positions. In terms of the bases of power, it is clear that the discourse on educational administration expects conformity to the male model from women aspiring to the superintendency. It is no wonder then, that the women are reluctant to place such pressure on their relationships that they risk losing them, for if they were to do that in order to secure a superintendency, they would be bereft of the very support systems that enable their male counterparts to be positioned differently in the discourses.

Alternative Approaches to Leadership

What is important is what being a female and being a male mean for interacting as workers, for making moral and ethical decisions, for understanding different points of view, for the way one balances one's time, or for what one sees as important tasks for an administrator. (Charol Shakeshaft, 1989, p. 216)

By focusing on what the women describe as satisfying in their work, on what they believe they do well, and on what they would do in a superintendent's position, we get a clear picture of what these women can contribute to educational leadership. Feminist and feminist poststructuralist approaches to administration provide ways to value nurturing kinds of activities, decisions that are child-centered, the relational aspects of school communities working together and alternative perspectives.

When asked to describe what they are good at in their jobs or what others thought were their strengths, the participants' responses fell into three categories: (1) people skills, (2) reflective practice with

a focus on instruction, and (3) offering alternative perspectives to problem-solving and decision-making. Some of the comments were also made during discussion of what kinds of job-related activities give the most satisfaction.

From a feminist poststructuralist point of view, it is clear that for women who have been constituted by the discourses of partnering and mothering in particular, many of their relational strengths crossover into their administrative practices. Furthermore, it is possible to see an emphasis on care and nurturing in these and many of the other discourses in which women are traditionally immersed. Unfortunately, however, because of the differential power relations that inhere in each of the discourses, the concern for maintaining relationships, the care and nurturing kinds of activities and the valuing of interpersonal connections are all associated with supporting positions. Further, such practices are also traditionally associated with women's positions in the discourses above. Therefore, these discursive practices are valued for their subsidiary role of holding an organization together not for moving it forward in the expected leadership role.

Indeed, if leadership is to be redefined as feminist perspectives suggest, it is important to keep a clear picture of the organization and internal power relations in mind to judge whether approval of alternative leadership styles is equally bestowed on the chief executive as well as those closest to him or her in the support positions. It is quite conceivable that demonstration of the following strengths and the attitudes that inform them is highly valued, but *only* in supporting positions such as assistant superintendencies and other central office roles. Furthermore, these skills can be so highly valued that opportunities for career advancement can be unforthcoming if the woman's contribution to the organization is seen by the superintendent for instance, as vital to its continuing welfare.

Denise Weir's comments help to make the distinction between the top-position and those directly beneath it.

> If any one of us [assistants] left it would have an impact significantly on [the superintendent]. But because of his style, he would be most comfortable picking up personnel and labor relations because it's something that he's done in his career and that's easier, that's less kind of threatening to him because he knows the most about it.... There are more women in curriculum and instruction than there are in business and operations or even in personnel. It's kind of an entry level. There are more women as elementary principals than there are as secondary.... It's been the entry route that women tended to have taken ... they're frequently key players that folks hate to lose because they are keeping a lot of bases covered. (Denise Weir)

By far the most frequent comments from the participants on their strengths and talents in administration had to do with their people skills, especially those that involved care, empathy or making other people feel comfortable. Indeed most participants commented on the human relations elements of their work.

> My competence in terms of instruction and inservice and curriculum and how to work with people, keeping a focus on children; all that I think is really good. I feel very competent in those areas.... I have a tremendous interest and some skill in getting along with a lot of different kinds of people and I enjoy that.
>
> (Rosalynn Grady)

Rosalynn emphasizes how much she enjoys "getting along" with people, not necessarily managing them. It suggests a lateral relationship with other members of the school community different from a more traditional leader's position of "leading" that can be interpreted as top-down directing.

Reflecting on her propensity to manage the input of others, Lorraine Darnell makes the important distinction between people carrying through others ideas and feeling real ownership of ideas themselves.

> There were people who felt that they'd done the task because I'd asked, but they didn't feel as good about it as I wanted them to feel. They didn't own it. It was my issue that they completed. It wasn't theirs. There was a need for them to know that it was their issue, even though it was mine, it was theirs, too and that the accomplishment was theirs. So I didn't give them enough support or capacity building to know that this is yours; "I'll support you as you do it, but you clearly have the capacity to do it." (Lorraine Darnell)

Informed by a morality of care and interdependence (Gilligan, 1982; Lyons, 1990), feminist leadership conceives of relationships within the organization that enhance each other. Empowerment and the subsequent capacity for the kind of leadership that is drawn from the combined strength of all members of the community can only come from an administrator like the enlightened Lorraine whose ability to step back and let others own their own accomplishments provided the necessary sense of trust. She now derives great satisfaction from her position as one who can enable others to achieve success.

Similarly, the capacity for reflection on available leadership strategies greatly enhances a leader's ability to stay in tune with the shifting, unstable environment in which she or he administrates. From a feminist standpoint that recognizes the existence of a never-ending variety of perspectives but rejects the relativist position of valuing all equally, reflective practice informs a leader of what his or her stand must be. This theory, as Capper (1993b) points out:

> ... would suggest that the school "leaders" "take a stand" within multiple epistemologies, overtly identify his/her own epistemological position, then recognize the partiality and contradictions within it, and engage in a constant self interrogation. (p. 33) (Quotations marks in the original)

In order to achieve this, in order to know what kind of values he or she holds, the leader needs to be one who engages in a reflective process of analyzing actions and behaviors in light of the intended outcomes and gaining feedback on the actual outcomes.

Janet Ryder puts it this way:

> It's a matter of having a number of experiences that you have to reflect on. For example, today's experience with this committee that I'm working (with) — I've never done an interdisciplinary unit thing before so you know it's kind of a risk to move through this process cause I really don't know where I 'm headed but each time I meet with those groups I come back and I sit and I think about it and I dialog with the other people that were involved and we talk about what's working what's not working and where are we headed?
>
> (Janet Ryder)

Openness to following the committees lead is expressed in the question "where are we headed?" That shows that the direction of the group can be negotiated. An interdependent relationship is being formed between administrator and group. Like most other participants, Janet's relational focus is strong.

Most of the participants, reflecting on the career moves they have made emphasize the drive they experiences to remain connected to people and programs. However, for this very reason, to remain close to people and programs, some of the participants express reservations about the superintendency. For some of the women the "political" nature of the job as they perceive it works against a leader's ability to remain program and instruction focused

> I just don't know if I want to deal with all the politics of it You've got all these publics that you're trying to respond to and meet the needs of and so it's like a juggling act; just trying to keep the balls in the air.
>
> (Elaine Schultz)

With few exceptions, the women in this study feel passionately about making a difference in the lives of children. Anita Lisle, for instance, contrasts the gendered leadership approaches on her administrative council.

> I think that women have an ability to be extra-sensitive on many of the human issues especially issues that affect children, and I don't believe the male counterpart brings the perception and the sensitivity to that particular issue. I am much more apt to want to make decisions pro-schools and pro-children on this council as opposed to making decisions about something that's going to improve the central administration or something that's going to improve the securities of the district. If I have a choice between textbooks or if I have a choice between putting some extra help in the classroom where I really do identify with the needs of children, my vote if it comes down to that, would certainly favor children. (Anita Lisle)

For those reasons Anita goes on to make a case for the inclusion of diverse leaders on every administrative team. Feminist approaches to leadership argue that the value of drawing upon different kinds of leaders is that they can provide multiple ways to conceive of a situation. And consequently, problem-solving and decision-making benefit from an expanded vision of humanity.

For instance, as Capper (1993b) warns us in her concerns about leadership practices that claim to empower: "Who defines 'emancipation,' 'social justice,' 'transformation,' 'true democracy'?" (p. 37). Without the inclusion of women's voices, and those of other minority groups virtually unrepresented on leadership teams and rarely in the position of chief executive, the implication is that all definitions will remain white male ones. Problems will continue to be identified by those with little or no emotional connection to the communities they serve.

It is interesting to note that in the words of those responsible for hiring superintendents as found in recent *Announcements of Vacancies*, many of the personal attributes the Board of Directors hopes to find in the new superintendent sound familiar. For instance, some of the brochures explicitly ask for individuals who are:

> ... skill[ed] in human relations and capable of working effectively with persons of differing personalities and viewpoints ... ("M" and "SC" School Districts, 1993)
>
> ... patient, caring, creative, respectful and enthusiastic friend[s] of the [district] children ... ("U" School District, 1993)
>
> ... accessible leaders with strong listening and communication skills, able to generate positive, trusting relationships ... ("T" School Districts, 1994)
>
> ... [leaders] with outstanding human relations skills ... ("Q" School District, 1994)

These are slight but encouraging signs that the dominant discourse is undergoing a shift. However, while these attributes *are* being sought by enlightened school boards, they are buried in amongst many other attributes that sound much more traditional. Indeed, if the brochures continue to ask for leaders with such personal attributes as those suggested by a feminist approach to leadership, and the majority of superintendents continue to be male, other forces must be seen to be at work. Blackmore (1991) for instance, argues that the conventional discourses of educational administration fail to take into account the broader social structures within which educational administration operates. She believes that the discourse

insists on "conceptualizing leadership in terms of gender-neutral personal attributes and focusing upon individual merit in apparently value-free contexts ..." (p. 20). It is therefore possible to claim the unsuitability of women leaders on socio-psychological grounds instead of recognizing that it is indeed "the manner in which educational leadership is conceptualized and practiced" (p. 21) that can be seen to keep women out of the superintendency.

Findings

This study yielded five significant findings about women aspiring to the superintendency in the K–12 public school systems. Originally driven by a desire to know why more women are not in the superintendency when there are many qualified and interested, in fact the study revealed much more than that. **First**, it confirmed the alternative approaches to leadership that feminist inquiry suggests are part of women's and other nontraditional leaders' styles. **Second**, it made clear the contexts within which a woman aspires to the superintendency. Not only did I come to understand how inextricably intertwined are the personal and professional lives of the women who participated in the study, but also the white, gendered nature of K–12 educational administration emerged particularly vividly. A **third** major finding of the study was the extent to which gender is a factor in a woman's preparation for the superintendency. The participants were seen as women first and administrators second.

Individual responses to this environment of gendered identities differed and a **fourth** important finding of the study was the variety of ways in which the women acted. Through the interviews I came to understand what considerations, both personal and professional, framed the aspirations of these women. The paths taken by the women towards the superintendency helped to create a fuller picture of the lived experiences of women administrators. An encouraging dimension to the study was to be able to recognize how these women found ways around some of the structures that were potentially inhibiting. Their points of resistance, their abilities to redefine the discourse for themselves suggest possible future shifts in the discourses of educational administration, *and* mothering, partnering and homemaking discourses when combined with educational administration in the K–12 public school systems.

Indeed, the study did uncover discouraging circumstances surrounding many of the women. A gap

emerged between expectations and aspirations for some of them who were poised professionally but not personally for the job. Most however, felt that timing was all. An important disheartening factor for two or three of the women was that at this time of their lives just when they were becoming free of personal responsibilities, they were also inevitably nearing the later stages of their careers.

The participants turned out to be highly capable administrators with clear visions of education, cognizant of their own potential for change within the public schools. Most have spent over 20 years in education, working to improve programs and instructional practices that have a direct impact on the learning environment of the students. Focused not only on their own careers, they modeled the kinds of commitment to the success of all children that is highly valued by this society. As nontraditional leaders, the participants have had a variety of experiences that have not always been valued by their peers or their supervisors. That they have resisted ultimate discouragement by holding on to their aspirations in the face of difficulties is a significant fifth finding of this study.

Implications for Reformed Practice

A discourse that effectively curtails the full participation of many women and some men, and especially women and men of color, must be disrupted. So far the discursive practices accepted in educational administration have selectively served the interests of only a portion of those educators who could contribute significantly to the welfare of the children in their care. Space must be created for others to find ways to reposition themselves favorably. If superintendents are to resemble those whose education they are responsible for, they must be representative of both genders and minority populations. Leadership must be released from stereotypical constraints and alternative approaches valued. Returning to the idea of the deconstruction of oppositions like superintendent/woman, or leader/woman, we must reject the concept of opposition and become open to the more fluid concept of superintendent or leader that includes the possibility of being both and neither of the terms as they are currently understood (Lather, 1991).

Therefore, policy makers and those responsible for the dominant discourse at universities and other institutions of higher education need to take a careful look at their training programs. Women's experiences and those of persons of color must be included (Shakeshaft, 1898). More women and persons

of color should be among the professors (McCarthy et al., 1988). Students of educational administration need to be able to see themselves reflected in the content of the programs and in the people from whom they are learning. They need to learn how women's ways of leading work in the practical day-to-day administering of schools.

For instance, if potential women superintendents like those in this study are disheartened by the political maneuvering that they observe around them, they need to be inspired by the creative notion that the political aspects of the job offer opportunities. As Scherr (in press) argues: "If they saw the political, public nature of the position as an opportunity for coalition building, more women might aspire to the superintendency and become mentors and role models" (Scherr, in press, p. 14). I would add that those who already aspire could get the intellectual stimulation they need from the creative attempt to turn things around to their advantage. Instead of having to remain within the fixed male definition of the politics of public school leadership, alternative approaches to leadership, can generate imaginative possibilities. That is the power of practice framed by theory.

Feminist perspectives on leadership and feminist theories of socialization must be given equal weight on administrative preparation course outlines. University texts that gloss over feminist contributions to scholarship or exclude them must be abandoned in favor of those that attempt to provide less partial and distorted accounts of the bases of knowledge. No longer can such a huge body of scholarship be ignored in the institutions of higher education that are responsible for the academic training of educational administrators.

Authentic superintendent internship experiences must be provided equally for all interns regardless of gender or ethnicity. This study has focused on the contextual power of constituting a subject afresh with each new experience. Therefore, superintendent interns must be offered potential opportunities to establish credibility in the eyes of those who have power to advocate their worth. If supervisors are not likely to treat women interns the same way they would treat men interns, women interns should be encouraged to find other supervisors who will. At the very least women interns should be encouraged to find ways to position themselves as potential superintendents during the internship so that they have the opportunity of being constituted differently by the experience.

Above all, those responsible for the dominant discourse must learn to value non-traditional approaches to the superintendency. For instance, school Boards of Directors need to be exposed to leaders who use alternative approaches to administration, who are promoted as best able to serve their needs. Influential superintendents and consultants need to advocate women with experiences different from the usual. In particular, policy makers must dissociate the job of superintendent from its current white male image.

Consistent with Greene's (1988) argument that support must be available for women who are in the process of redefining their positions within the discourse, it is imperative that women already in powerful jobs like the superintendency or in consultantcies, actively network with others who aspire to similar positions. The most important support they can provide for each other is access to the system. Many administrators stated that one of their main responsibilities was to provide for aspiring women administrators and women of potential the kind of encouragement that they need in very practical ways. Kate Wilhelm, for instance belongs to a statewide association of women in administration that sponsors annual workshops for women who would like to become principals. She and others also reach out to women in-district with the kind of day-to-day advice and emotional support women need.

Other kinds of networking are also crucial. Women in supporting positions like the assistant superintendent have no formal organization that is position related. They are not superintendents and although are often invited to superintendents meetings they are not really in that peer group. Thus, they do not derive the benefits of being able to relate to other assistant superintendents on regular informal basis. Many of the women in the study, in this support role, pointed out that except on occasion, they have few other women who experience similar situations with whom to share ideas and struggles. As Weedon (1987) made clear, unless women get to talk to other women about what they experience, it is possible for each individual to see frustration and conflict as residing within themselves instead of the social structures within which they are subjectified. If women were to network more often and more visibly not only would alternative perspectives gain a greater hold on the dominant discourse but they too, would be seen as a coherent group able to make recommendations for hiring potential administrators as their male counterparts.

Indeed, recommendations for further research include in-depth studies of successful women leaders who use alternative styles. Studies that focus particularly on the context of leadership in the organization will tell us how alternative leadership works. If we are better informed about the daily administrative actions and reflections of women school leaders who care more about teaching and learning than about the traditional management of an organization, we can provide better training for others to follow.

Further, such women leaders need to be celebrated. Their accomplishments with children must be broadcast loudly so that alternative approaches to leadership come to be associated with good education. A concerted effort must be made by all those who value alternative leadership to place it before the public often and persuasively. Community members need to be informed of the potential outcomes of women's ways of leading. The public must be able to say that is how we want our children educated so that support grows from the bottom up. We cannot mandate a change of leadership styles, but we can carry out enough solid research that the results speak for themselves.

Thus, by reformed practices such as these, leadership and consequently the superintendency would not be associated with any particular style nor with either one of the genders. A full range of leadership styles and behaviors would be available to all. Freedom would given to aspirants to present different and more relevant skills and visions than those that are now dictated by the dominant discourse. In the current climate of economic and environmental concerns that extend globally, neither the United States nor any other single nation has the luxury to remain aloof. Relationships of interdependence will mean the likelihood of a decent survival for many. Thus, not only are feminist informed alternatives to leadership to be valued for their immediate effects of providing a better education, but feminist approaches to social change are necessary for the possibilities of a more equitable existence in this increasingly diverse society.

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